Turning a Comprehensive Revitalization Study to a Reform Program:

A Roadmap for a Practical and Inclusive Implementation.

1) Background

The new Addis Ababa University Administrative Board (AAUB) that was named by the reformist government in 2011 EC (2019 GC) was given as a primary responsibility to initiate a substantive reform process that would enable AAU to be the premier world class higher education institution in the country, among the top Higher Education institutions in the African Continent as well as a well-recognized and notable research and teaching institution across the world. At the least, it was understood that it will be extremely important to bring AAU to the level of its Glory days of the 1960s in terms of improving the quality of its teaching and research as well as the overall vibrant academic and intellectual environment that obtained during those years. It is also expected to play a constructive role as an important institution that operates within the larger democratic objectives of the reform and contribute towards its realization. Furthermore, the broad understanding between the government that selected the board and the members of the board was that in order to achieve these objectives, there is nothing that is considered sacred and that the reform would look into everything that have hindered AAU from achieving these stated objectives.

The AAUB took this challenge seriously and very quickly started a discussion within the board as well as with various stakeholders of AAU (management, faculty, staff and students) to get a sense of the current state of the University and the challenges that it encounters to achieve the objectives stated above. These discussions and consultations with stakeholders gave the board

a sense of the complexity of the problem the institution is facing as well as an entry point to chart a course for the conduct of the reform process.

The first step in this endeavor, the board agreed, was to conduct a comprehensive study to identify the key problems that the reform has to address and come up with a list of recommendations that, if implemented, could address these problems and help AAU achieve the stated objectives of the reform. Accordingly, the board decided to establish a study team that include current and former AAU faculty, the Addis Ababa business community, and experts from the diaspora community with thorough international experience in University management, that are also alumni of AAU. AAUB then authorized the budget needed to do the study from the University and the work of the study team commenced in the Fall of 2019 GC. The board also assigned two board members to follow up on the study and help address any problems that the study team might encounter while conducting this study until its completion.

The study team completed the first draft of its work sometime in June 2020 and submitted its report to the two board members assigned to the study team, which was then sent to the full board to study the report and organize a meeting of the board to discuss the study and determine how to proceed. After some delay because of difficulties posed by the Covid-19 Pandemic, the board took up the issue on Thursday December 4, 2020 aided by an able and thorough presentation from Prof. Bahru Zewdie, a representative of the study team. This was followed by a detailed discussion within the board. Board members offered a number of suggestions to be included in the study and then unanimously endorsed the study. The board then agreed to meet the following Tuesday (December 8, 2020) to discuss and decide on an implementation strategy. The board also assigned one of its members to prepare a roadmap for

the implementation to help the discussion in its next board meeting. This brief roadmap is therefore prepared to aid the discussion of AAUB in designing its implementation strategy.

2) The Road map for a reform.

As is well known, the success of a reform depends on both the substantive elements included in the reform itself and the design of its implementation. It is crucial for the success of the reform to get buy in and commitment from the various stakeholders that are going to play a significant role in its success. Reforming a large and complex institution, with diverse and competing interests, such as the AAU is not an easy task. While there is a broad agreement from a wide spectrum of the AAU community (as the study clearly indicates) that the institution desperately needs thoroughgoing reform to enable it to fulfill its mission, it does not necessarily mean that there will be a consensus as to the depth and breadth of the intended reform. There are also other institutions (for example, MOSHE) that would have a stake in the outcome of the reform. It is, therefore, important to carefully design its implementation to understand and then minimize the potential resistance that could come from elements both from within the AAU and from external sources.

Resistance and opposition to a reform can be triggered for various reasons. The first and obvious one is from not understanding the objective of the reform and its various components. It is therefore important to include a mechanism to educate all stakeholders about the content and the value of the reform program. Another form of resistance could come from entrenched interests who might feel threatened by some elements of the reform. It is important to understand these entrenched interests and include mechanisms to mitigate and weaken such

resistance in the implementation design. In institutions such as AAU where various top down reform initiatives were attempted in the past, and failed, there is a serious trust deficit in the community with regards to the commitment of the reformers to take the reform all the way to its logical conclusion. Lack of clarity on the timing of the reform process could weaken the resolve and commitment of potential supporters of the reform from within the community that are otherwise needed for the successful implementation of the reform. It is also important to carefully select a competent and committed implementation team in such a way that it can muster the confidence and support of both the initiators of the reform and the various stakeholders of the institution. Keeping these and other issues in mind and being intentional about the problems that can emanate in the process of implementation, it is useful to adopt a flexible problem-solving mechanism to address emerging problems while at the same time being laser focused on the ultimate objective of the reform.

Stages in the implementation process

It is possible to identify five stages through which this process (from its current stage) would go through with multiple activities in each stage of the process. It should be expected that while some of the activities in each stage might have to follow the stages that preceded them, other activities might be undertaken concurrently without waiting for the completion of the stages before it.

1) **Stage I: The preparation phase.**

This is the phase where the board (which is presumed to be the supervising authority of the whole reform process) is absolutely clear about the objective of the reform, the various

elements included in the reform that are necessary to achieve this objective, potential sources of resistance and a strategy to ameliorate them as well as a rough agreement on the time required for a smooth implementation of the reform at each stage until its completion. The board needs to speak in one voice about everything related to the reform including its commitment to see the reform through its final phases of implementation. This requires, among other things:

a) A thorough understanding of the reform study and its recommendations
b) A clear understanding of the sources of resistance to the reform as well as the potential allies of the reform movement both within the AAU community and external stakeholders.
c) A rough agreement on the time frame for the various stages the reform passes through. It should also set a binding deadline for the completion of the reform process. (The outside boundary should not exceed the tenure of this board since any time beyond that will leave the process to a new body whose commitment to the reform will be unknown and, therefore, can potentially leave a debilitating uncertainty about the whole reform process.)
d) Come to an agreement on a clear implementation strategy that include issues such as determining the implementation body, (from within the university community? Hiring independent consultants? …etc.) the resource requirement for implementation, the items that the implementation process should minimally include (the kind of consultations that must be conducted, for example) as well as setting a clear and binding timeline for implementation.

2) Stage 2: The education phase

Once the board achieves a common understanding and consensus on the whole reform process, the next stage will be selling the reform project to various stakeholders. This is an important stage in that we can achieve clarity, and therefore avoid resistance, for the reform from the stakeholders that are going to be crucial to a successful completion of the project. This stage must necessarily include a presentation of the reform study, a clear presentation of the implementation process and a clear timeline of implementation all the way to its completion. This follows directly from item "d" in stage 1, where the various bodies that need to be consulted are properly identified and how to conduct the consultations (in terms of external vis. Internal, prioritization in the consultation process…etc.) is settled. Here the only thing that needs to be itemized in this stage is defining the outcome of the consultations some tactical measures that could help us identify strong supporters of the reform that can be used more effectively in the implementation process. Here are some suggested activities:

a) As much as possible, the consultations must aim at understanding the reform and instilling a sense of ownership of the reform by the stakeholders rather than something imposed from some authority. It also needs to make a clear distinction between the macro aspect of the reform (that is aimed at the whole governing structure of the institution and its relation to the government) from the micro elements (such as fixing the toilets in the various buildings, or exactly what the salary structure and incentive system will be…etc.) which would be implemented once the macro reform is in place.

b) Stakeholders must also achieve clarity on the board's intentions on process. It is, for example, possible that the board might be clear about the final objective of the reform (for example having an institutional autonomy in the form of creating a chartered university) but might feel that there are a number of secondary reforms that need to be undertaken before we reach that stage. If that is the case, this needs to be very clearly communicated with all the stakeholders (including external stakeholders) so that we can avoid unnecessary resistance from external forces that might fear sudden loss of control over the institution on the one hand, and from potential supporters of the reform within the institution who might doubt the board's commitment to the complete reform if they feel that the reform will Peter out after doing the secondary reforms. The board needs to also be clear within itself and in its communications with external stakeholders such as MOSHE about whether it wants to sell this reform as a pilot project to serve as a test case for reforming all universities in the country or whether it wants to sell it as a standalone project unique to AAU because of its history, its expected role in the future within the larger reform movement in the country…etc.

c) Consultations should obviously be done with all the stakeholders ultimately and must be as inclusive as possible.

d) It might be worth considering having the consultations in AAU start with a small group of "change agents" if we can identify them a priori and thoroughly sell the project to them first before we go directly to the broader community. If we can find such a group of influential academics within the AAU and make them own the reform from the

beginning, they might make our life of selling the project to the broader community much easier and help in the implementation process.

e) Ditto with MOSHE. Before formally presenting the study to MOSHE, it might be good to identify and communicate with a small group of influential people in the institution that would help us sell the reform when it comes to the formal process.

f) This could be even more important if there is a mechanism to discuss the project privately with the institution/personalities that would eventually make the final decision (above MOSHE such as the PMO) early in the process.

3) **Stage 3: Preparing the detailed implementation program.**

This is one stage that doesn't have to wait for the completion of the first two stages (especially the second stage) to be implemented. It can be done concurrently with the second stage by the board or using consultants. What is clear is that we need a committed professional body outside the current management of AAU and directly accountable to the board (preferably working full time) that will follow through the implementation until its completion. The tasks for this stage of the work include:

a) Preparing a TOR for the implementation team with defined time line, a clear list of deliverables (including documents that need to be prepared by the team) and select the implementation team

b) Determine the extent of the work involved and the resources that are required for the task.

c) Determine the sources of funding for the task and make sure the process will not be delayed because of lack of funding as well as minimizing the bureaucratic red tape in fund disbursement.

d) Assign a team of board members that work closely with the implementation team

e) It is also important at this stage to know what the post reform institution would look like in terms of its management and the personnel needed to run the institution. This is a very sensitive part of the reform as it might trigger resistance from interest groups within the institution. Would the current administration at various levels continue to run AAU in its new reincarnation? Does the University instate a new management team (possibly including some of the current management) with new recruitment criteria? Does the new management entirely come from the current faculty and staff or should there be an open recruitment including from outside the university and outside the country? This discussion has to take place within the board at this stage of the process and come up with a clear plan as to how to proceed.

4) Stage 4: Implementation of the reform and completing the reform within the agreed time frame.

This is the final stage of the process. The board's task at this stage is to make sure there is proper follow up including the degree to which the reform is taking place according to schedule. The board needs to carefully monitor the implementation process to identify problems in implementation and make sure they are addressed promptly. The board has to show its full engagement in the process by getting regular written reports from the

implementation team and/or from the assigned board members as well has having meetings with the implementation team and the “change agents” to simply ask how the process is going. This is also an important time to make sure that the reform implementation process does not impede the day to day workings of the institution and that all the other “regular” activities of the university are proceeding normally.

Another important task at this stage is to have a detailed understanding with the government about how the reformed institution is to operate including the structure that the government puts in place to oversee its interests in the institution based on the new structure, the budget allocation mechanism, the accountability process within the new “autonomy” framework and the like. These important details have to be worked out before the final launch is underway.

5) Stage 5: The final launch

I hope this will give us something to chew on before our next meeting and come up with additional details or comments.